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The Story Behind Zanzibar Revolt

ZANZIBAR CITY, Zanzibar—Lenin may have been smuggled into Russia via a sealed train, but down Zanzibar way that is very old hat as a method of getting revolutionaries from here to there.

Here in East Africa, the key members of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council were brought from a resort called Silver Sands, some 14 miles north of Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanganyika, to Zanzibar in a glass-bottomed boat piloted by Mischa Feinsilber, the only non-African member of the Afro-Shirazi Party—the party that staged the revolution. Feinsilber is a man of high adventure having been, among other things, a lion tamer for Frank Buck during the New York World's Fair of 1939.

For the last 20 years, Feinsilber has been one of Zanzibar's first citizens, owning both a lime factory on the island and the Ocean Products Corp. which specializes in the sale of lobsters. In Tanganyika he is the proprietor of that hospitality house for revolutionaries, the Silver Sands.

On reason the out-of-this-world story of the Zanzibar revolution has hitherto been untold is no doubt due somewhat to the fact that it does not exactly show its principal beneficiaries in a heroic light. In any case, here for the first time are the facts as to how it

all happened in Zanzibar as pieced together from official Western and African sources and with some essential missing links tracked down here in Zanzibar.

In the first place, Abeid Karume, the original leader of the Afro-Shirazi Party who took over as president of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council and subsequently as vice president of the Tanganyika-Zanzibar "union" was taken totally by surprise by the revolution that catapulted him into power.

WHEN THE shooting erupted last January on an early Sunday morning, Karume, thinking that the Arabs of the sultan's minority government were on a rampage, rushed to the beach, found a canoe, and paddled furiously the 20 miles to Dar es Salaam. Already in Dar es Salaam were other Afro-Shirazi leaders who had heard rumors of an intended pogrom against them by the sultan. And the fabled "Babu" was in Dar es Salaam enroute back from his latest trip to Peking.

It was not until Sunday night that Karume and others discovered what had happened. It seems that the second echelon or branch secretaries of the Afro-Shirazi parties had become so disgusted with the feuding between Afro-Shirazi leader Abeid Karume and his principal Afro-Shirazi rival,

Othman Shariff (who during the revolution locked himself in the basement of his Zanzibar home) that they themselves decided to stage the often plotted but much postponed revolution against the Arab minority government.

One John Okello, formerly Afro-Shirazi branch secretary on the neighboring island of Pemba, took over the original handful of 40 to 50 freedom fighters in the Zanzibar revolution and with genuine bravery, charged the main police station and the radio station. Pleased with his success, Okello proclaimed himself field marshal and while the Afro-Shirazi rank and file (now joined among others by the 37 Cuban-trained Afro-Arab freedom fighters) rampaged, looted and killed, Okello had enough sense to announce over the Zanzibar radio that the new revolutionary cabinet would be led by Karume, the obvious choice because he was the official head of the Afro-Shirazi Party in whose name the revolution was launched.

And thus it was that Karume and his fellow "exiles" huddled together at Mischa Feinsilber's Silver Sands learned by radio that this was "their revolution" and that power in Zanzibar was theirs for the taking.

AS FEINSILBER recalls it: "The entire cabinet named by Okello was at my house. Every-

body piled into my glass bottom boat and we reached Zanzibar early Monday morning."

In the meanwhile, the British had refused the sultan's frantic plea for assistance, and in the ghastly blood letting of the next four days, at least 3,000 Arabs were killed, by official Western estimate.

"I told the Americans a revolution was inevitable," said Feinsilber. "It would have been so easy to have had the friendship of the Afro-Shirazi Party. Instead, for too long there was a vacuum. Now the Americans have to start from way behind in seeking good relations with the Zanzibaris."

AN EARLY casualty of the revolution was "field marshal" Okello who proved to be a madman. As a Zanzibari official told it: "It got so that he would come to revolutionary council meetings with guns in each hand which he would point at one or another of us. It was too unsettling."

It took several banishments to make Okello's departure from Zanzibar stick and finally President Karume himself had to go to the airport to intercept him and forbid his presence. Okello went off, arriving in tears in Dar es Salaam complaining of the ingrates on Zanzibar who so callously failed to appreciate his services including the killing of more than 7,000 people—a claim which fortunately was exaggerated.